

First Presbyterian Church
130 West Miner Street
West Chester
Chester County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1115

HABS
PA
15 WCHES
6-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

PA
15-WCHS

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Location: 130 West Miner Street, West Chester, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner and Occupant: First Presbyterian Church.

Present Use: Church.

Statement of Significance: This Classic Revival Presbyterian Church was one of the earlier designs of Thomas U. Walter.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: First Presbyterian Church, West Chester, Pennsylvania.
2. Date of erection: Corner stone laid 1832; occupied 1834. Estimated cost of \$5,000 exceeded.
3. Architect, builder, suppliers, etc.: Thomas U. Walter, architect - no record of fee found. David Haines and James Powell, carpenters. Eli Pyle, stone mason. John Cornog, marble mason.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Original plans not found. See copy of newspaper article dated July 10, 1832, for account of original lay-out of building (may be found under Part I, D of this report). The 73 foot cupola mentioned was never built due to lack of funds. It seems impossible to determine if Walter planned an apse or not, for the present apse may well be the result of the 1862 alteration. Original pews of walnut divided by center aisle. The thesis of G. Carroll Lindsay (listed under Part I, A, 6 of this report) gives a very full discussion of the original of the plan for this very early building by Walter.
5. Alterations and additions: Original building had 25 feet added to the south end in the early 1860's. This enlargement allowed for 40 additional pews making the seating capacity 600 in addition to the gallery. At the same time the interior was "frescoed, painted and furnished." The expense for such alterations was \$1,968.60. In 1874 further changes were made to the interior as described in

the copy of a newspaper clipping dated September 16, 1814, which appears under Part I, D, 5 of this report. The next major change was the addition of a large Sunday School to the east of the church on the site of the old manse. The new portion was built in 1892 and 1893 at a cost of \$21,000, T. Roney Williamson, architect. It was of brown stone. This section was remodeled in 1923 and completely rebuilt in 1956-1957, this last time with William D. Savage, architect. Copy of a newspaper clipping dated October 5, 1955, describes this alteration (see Part I, D). In 1905 a much larger pipe organ (\$3100.00) was constructed as well as new windows and furnishings secured at a total cost of \$7,500.00.

6. Important old views and references:

a. Old views:

Daily Graphic, New York, for November 3, 1879. (Copy in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa.)

Laird, Washington R. History of First Presbyterian Church of West Chester, Pa. West Chester, Pa.: Village Record Print, 1909.

Facing page 17 is a reproduction of a very early drawing, the original of which is not to be found. It is entitled "The Church and Manse (from an Old Sketch)"; from the costumes of the figures shown, it dates from about 1850-1855. At least it is before the church was lengthened in the 1860's.

b. References: All to be found in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa., unless otherwise noted.

Lindsay, G. Carroll. Athens on High Street--The Architectural Works of Thomas U. Walter in West Chester, Pennsylvania. 1955. (Typed thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, University of Delaware. Copy is in the University Library, Newark, Del.)

Classified printed and manuscript files in the Chester County Historical Society under heading: West Chester-Churches, Presbyterian.

Laird, Washington R. History of First Presbyterian Church of West Chester, Pa. West Chester, Pa.: Village Record Print, 1909.

Ulrich, Harry Edwin. Record of One Hundredth Anniversary of the First Presbyterian Church of West Chester, Pennsylvania, 1934. (Publisher and place not given.)

Minutes of the Trustees (of the First Presbyterian Church of West Chester, Pennsylvania) 1834-1911. Longhand. In possession of the church.

Minutes of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church (of West Chester, Pennsylvania) 1834-1897. Longhand. In possession of the church.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The Presbytery of New Castle had supplied West Chester with preachers off and on from the time the county seat was removed to the present location in 1786. Meetings were held in the original court house. The first building owned by the congregation is the present one, one of the earliest efforts of Thomas U. Walter and the first of a long series that he planned for West Chester between 1832 and 1846. The important feature of the building is the recessed porch with two Ionic columns in antis, all placed in an enclosed area on either side. The plans for this building and that of the West Presbyterian Church, Carmine Street, New York, by Davis must have been made within months of each other. The possible source, common to both, is the plan of St. Philippe-du-Roule, Paris.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

- None known.

D. Supplemental Material:

1. "WEST CHESTER, JULY 6, 1832

"The Corner Stone of a Presbyterian Church in this Borough, was laid on the 3d instant, in the presence of a large concourse of citizens of both sexes.

"The ceremony consisted of a statement from WILLIAM H. DILLINGHAM, Chairman of the Building Committee, explaining their plan, resources, views and objects, with some remarks upon the importance of the work. The document to be deposited was then read by THOMAS S. BELL, Esq., a member of the Committee, who was followed by the Rev. Mr. STEVENS in a highly appropriate prayer, invoking the blessing of Heaven upon the enterprise.

"The stone was then adjusted by the Master Builders and Architect, when a concluding prayer was offered up by

Elder SIMEON SIEGFRIED.

"Copy of the DOCUMENT deposited.

"On Tuesday July 3d, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-two, this Corner Stone of the
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
Was laid by the Rev. WILLIAM A. STEVENS, officiating Presbyterian Clergyman in this Borough.

"Attended by
William H. Dillingham,
Henry Fleming,
Asher Miner,
Joseph A. Davidson, and
Thomas S. Bell.
Building Committee.

"And assisted by the Rev. Levi Scott and Thomas Sovereign of the Methodist Church, and Elder Simeon Siegfried, of the Baptist Denomination - in the presence of numerous other citizens assembled on the occasion.

"Architect - Thomas U. Walter.

"Carpenters - David Haines, and
James Powell.

"Stone Mason - Eli Pyle.

"President of the United States - Andrew Jackson.

"Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania - George Wolf.

"Population of West Chester, 1500.

"Corresponding Committee - Rev. Wm. A. Stevens,
Gen. John W. Cunningham.

"Collecting Committee - William Everhart, Esq.
Gen. John W. Cunningham,
Robert Ralston,
John T. Denny.

"Trustees - Ziba Pyle, Esq.,
Robert Ralston,
Henry Fleming.

"THOMAS WILLIAMSON, Scribes.

"Then followed the names of subscribers to the fund.

"Mr. John Cornog is the Marble Mason. The contract with him not having been made until after laying the Corner Stone, his name does not appear on the document deposited.

"The following is a copy of the address, which by request of the Building Committee has been furnished for publication.

"WE have assembled to lay the corner stone of a Presby-

terian Church. The plan of the house we propose to erect has been furnished by a competent architect who will superintend its execution, and whose efforts thus far, have inspired general confidence. The building is to be of stone, rough cast, 75 feet long by 45 feet wide, and 23 feet in height. It is calculated to seat 500 people on the ground floor; and galleries can hereafter be erected, to accommodate 300 more, if occasion should require. The foundation will be a few feet above the pavement; and a sufficient excavation has been made to admit of the construction of a basement story. The architecture is Grecian, in good taste, and there is to be a cupola, if our funds will admit, 73 feet in height from the ground.

"The estimated cost as we purpose now to finish it, is \$5000. Of this sum \$3000 is already subscribed - \$2100 of it in this borough; \$200 in other parts of the county, and \$700 in the city of Philadelphia. We are encouraged to hope, that we shall be able to raise the balance before our building is completed.

"In the site we are happily all united, and our lot 84 feet front by 145 feet deep, has been procured upon favourable terms. In connexion with it, and within two squares distance, we have presented to us from William Everhart, Esq. besides his handsome subscription, half an acre of land for a burial ground. Our contracts with the carpenters, mason, and for stone, have been advantageously made. The work is to be commenced immediately, and prosecuted vigorously, will be covered in this fall, and finished in less than a year.

"In the stone now to be laid there will be deposited a glass vase, hermetically sealed, containing an account of the proceedings of this day, the names of the clergymen attending, the different committees, architect, carpenters, mason, and the subscribers to our fund, all handsomely written on fine paper, together with a copy of the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the confession of faith, and a copy of the Holy Bible. As historical mementos, we have also inscribed upon the paper the names of the President of the United States and the Governor of the Commonwealth, and deposited therewith one of each denomination of silver coin struck in the year 1832."

/Chester County Democrat, West Chester, Pa., July 10, 1832./

2. "The corner stone of the Presbyterian Church in the Borough will be laid this day (Tues. July 3rd) at 5 P.M. The clergymen of the place have been invited to attend.

"Though our paper does not come out until tomorrow (as you will see by its date) yet we cheerfully give the above notice; as we deem it a goodly work - like the plan of the building."

/Village Record, West Chester, Pa., July 4, 1832.⁷

3. "Enlarging - The congregation attached to the West Chester Presbyterian Church, have resolved to enlarge their Church Edifice - by the addition of twenty-five feet to the rear."

/Village Record, West Chester, Pa., July 10, 1860.⁷

4. "The Presbyterian Church, which has been undergoing enlargement and repair, will be opened for service, on Sunday next. The Rev. John Crowell, a former Pastor of the church, will assist. Services at 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ A.M., and 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ P.M."

/Village Record, West Chester, Pa., September 28, 1861.⁷

5. "The Presbyterian Church Improvements.

"The work of remodeling the inside apartments of the Presbyterian Church of this Borough, is progressing finely, and so extended and creditable is the change which is fast taking shape at the hands of the skilled mechanic, that we deem it worthy of more than a passing notice.

"At present the audience room is divested of its former entire outfit, and presents a wide, clear scope for the putting in of the handsome new walnut pews, which are expeditiously being fashioned at the planing mill of Mr. Henry Baldwin. These pews are being constructed with a view of both comfort and elegance, and in the way of arrangement will be located in semi-circular tiers, so that all the audience will face the speaker with ease. The aisles will not be materially changed from the old plan; there being one on either side with a wider or main one in the centre. The pulpit will be located about the height of the pew backs from the floor, and its position will be nearer the congregation than the one of old. In front of the pulpit a semi-circular aisle will be formed by the front pews and the pulpit platform. Back of the pulpit and in the enlarged recess, the organ and choir will be handsomely provided for, both in the way of ample room and beauty of surroundings. At the front entrance of the room it is intended to have a small vestibule with self-closing doors, which will render the rear portion of the room as agreeable as the front. The ungainly projection now attached to the gallery, will be removed, as will also the pillars supporting the same from the floor below. All

of the pews will be provided with cushions made of the same material and after the same design. The pews will have no doors, and the partitions will only be so far as the seat is concerned; the entrance passage in each one being clear and unobstructed from one end to the other, thus presenting and affording more social facilities and greater comforts than is proffered in the old stiff style of pews. The carpet over the whole room inside of pews included, will be of one style, kind and pattern, the bottoms of the pews being so arranged as to allow of its being put down and taken up without difficulty or injury to the material. There is a desire also to extend the work of improvement to the windows, and by means of dividing them lengthwise, arching their tops and supplying finely stained glass in the place of the small plain panes now in use, will render harmony and finish in keeping with the other work above described. The walls and ceiling, too, will also put on a new dress at the hands of the fresco artist. The ceiling will be clad in sky blue for a body tint, with neat ornamentations of hues to contrast in pleasing and deceptive relief in the developing of the scroll and panel designs, which the improvement committee have selected. The walls will be similarly decorated, only the body color will be of a different shade - that of a light purple tint.

"The gas fixtures, too, will receive a change from their present arrangement. In this feature no definite plan has been as yet agreed upon, but the one receiving the most consideration points to a long gas pipe connecting the two present ceiling burners at a distance of about six feet from the ceiling, and from which jets to protrude on either side at distance of about 15 or 18 inches. It is thought that this plan will serve to do away with the present side lights.

"In the lower or basement story of the new addition erected to form a recess back of the pulpit for choir purposes, some providing mind has carefully studied what may be frequently needed, in the way of fitting up this apartment with flue, pipe hole and water sink, and which on the occasion of a fair, festival, sociable, or some such happy event, will amply serve the purpose of a coffee or cook room. From this room also a stairway leads up into the choir apartment so that the performers may come or retire without annoyance either to the minister, the congregation or themselves. The outside of the entire structure will receive a full and liberal coat of paint in imitation of granite, which, with a general freshening up of the exterior wood work, will complete a very elaborate and creditable improvement, not only to the church, but to West Chester.

"The cost of this thorough siege of renovation and repair is estimated at about \$3,000, and the date for the applying of the final touches has been fixed at or about the first of next November."

Daily Local News, West Chester, Pa., September 16, 1874.7

6. "THE PRESBYTERIAN CHAPEL
"CARPENTERS ARE FINISHING THEIR WORK ON THE BUILDING.

"Beautiful Windows Dedicated to the Dead and
Presented by the Living,

"Who are the Donors:

"The carpenters are putting the finishing touches on the new chapel of the Presbyterian Church, and soon their work will be complete. A few weeks will yet be required for the furnishing of the different rooms, this delay being the only serious obstacle in the way of occupying the building at once.

"The large main room, with the infant room adjoining and separated from the general apartment by folding doors, which can be opened during the exercises in which all in the building may desire to take part, is cheerful, light and comfortable. The numerous light tints on the stained glass present that dim effect which is so common in places of worship.

"Above the infant room a large apartment, like a broad gallery, opens into the main room, and there the pastor's Bible class will be located, affording the adult pupils an opportunity to look down upon the younger ones and at the same time to set them a good example by way of deportment and regular attendance. This class is by far the largest in the school, and its members claim for it that the lessons are made more interesting than in any other. The teacher, Rev. W. R. Laird, seldom misses a Sunday. This body of workers has in the infant room a handsome memorial window dedicated to Miss Caroline Williamson, who for a long time was connected with the Sunday School.

"Another window in the infant room has been placed there in memory of the late Theodore P. Apple, whose family take much interest in the church. The emblems are a cross and crown.

"The pupils of the Sunday School, by general collection, have raised the money for two handsome windows, one of which will be marked with the name of a former pastor, Rev. Dr. J. C. Caldwell.

"Two windows, bearing pictures of winged cherubs flying amidst a bank of clouds, are in memory of Thomas W. Marshall, Jr., whose life lasted from 1879 to 1884. Another, showing a descending dove, is in memory of Robert H. Thorp, a son of Dr. W. K. Thorp. Easter lilies mark a window which is in memory of Sallie F. Moore, who lived from 1864 to 1886, and there is another fine piece of ornamental work dedicated to Robert S. Mercer.

"WELL KNOWN CITIZENS HONORED.

"In the large room two of the most prominent windows are dedicated to the remembrance of Dr. Wilmer Worthington, who lived from 1804 to 1873, and his wife, Elizabeth Worthington, who was born in 1810 and died in 1875. They were the parents of Casper S. Worthington, of West Chester.

"The late Hon. J. Smith Futhey, President Judge of the Courts of Chester County, is kept in mind by two windows, the one bearing the Greek letter Omega and the date 1820, and the other having the letter Alpha and the date 1888.

"The Mission Band of Willing Hands has a window bearing the text 'A Little Child Shall Lead Them.' The organization is composed of active little girls who raised the money by a fair.

"Hon. William McCullough is remembered by the token of an open Bible illumined by a star which shines above. This window, which is on the western side of the building, was presented by Mrs. S. D. Ramsey's class and Mrs. McCullough and daughter.

"Two pretty cherubs, with wings instead of bodies, are represented as in flight upon two windows placed side by side and bearing the names of Carrie Hughes Hannum, daughter of Curtis H. Hannum, and Eleanor Brinton Ramsey, daughter of Samuel D. Ramsey. These two energetic girls raised the needed funds by a fair which they gave last winter. They started with the expectation of giving one window, but found themselves able to purchase two.

"The Christian Endeavor Society's window bears a Greek cross, and the junior branch of the same organization has a glass panel bearing a branch of wild roses.

"Captain W. S. Underwood's class has a window on which passion flowers are shown, and Easter lilies are on a window by the class of Miss Josephine James. Miss Mary Mercer's boys have provided a window with the inscription, 'She Hath Done What She Could.' The tablets of stone, on which the decalogue was given to Moses, are on a window given by Miss Carrie W. Heed's class, and the boys of class

No. 10 have chosen for their text the words 'Lord, be Thou my helper.'

"The large round window at the front gable will be furnished by Mr. John J. Pinkerton."

/Daily Local News, West Chester, Pa., July 12, 1893./

7. "A contract for the construction of a large addition to the First Presbyterian Sunday School, Miner and Darlington sts., and a general overhauling and renovating of the present building has been awarded to Earl Thomas, building contractor, 24 S. High st., by a committee which has been at work on the project for several months. It is for the sum of \$152,410.

"Announcement of the awarding of the contract was made yesterday by Horace Y. Sumption who served as chairman of the original planning committee which was authorized to proceed by the congregation at a meeting held in January, 1954. Later he was made chairman of the building committee and continues in that capacity today.

"The letting of the contract for the work which is expected will be started 'within the next few days,' according to a letter mailed last night to members of the congregation, climaxes more than 18 months of work on the part of the planning committee which was named in February, 1954, and later the building committee which took over when the former committee was dismissed with thanks at the annual congregational meeting last January 19. There was little difference, however, in the personnel of the two groups.

...

"Complete New Front

"Plans call for the removal of the apartment house at 128 W. Miner st., standing immediately to the east of the church and which the church has owned for many years. Two smaller houses to the rear of this property will also be razed to make room for new construction and extension of the present Sunday School property.

"The brown stone front of the Sunday School which was completed more than a half-century ago will be replaced with a front which will harmonize with the church proper. In making this change a hope that has been expressed for many years will finally be fulfilled."

/Daily Local News, West Chester, Pa., October 5, 1955./

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is one of Thomas U. Walter's earlier church designs done in the classical revival style.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Original part forty-five feet (45') (three bay front) by seventy-five feet (75') by twenty-three feet (23') high.
2. Foundations: Three stone block courses visible above grade.
3. Wall construction: Rough-cast stone covered with stucco.
4. Porches: There is an elevated Ionic Portico on north front which is distyle in antis.
5. Chimneys: Not original.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The original door opening on the north front has a wooden double door with triangular pediment and brackets on either side.
 - b. Windows and shutters: All original window openings of the original building remain according to the earliest sketch. Each opening has double windows of one-over-one-light double-hung sash. They have no shutters. The windows of the newer additions to the church are four six-over-six-light, one nine-over-nine-light and two one-over-one-light and three six-over-nine-light double-hung wooden sash windows.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Low tin-covered gable roofs.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Original, reproduced on extensions. An undecorated entablature except for fascia.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The Church is a center aisle space with two smaller side aisles. The pulpit is to the left and marks the beginning of the rectangular apse. The gallery extends along the north end and has one stair, at the northwest corner. It is incorporated into the enclosed space at the northwest corner of the recessed porch. The corresponding enclosed space on the northeast corner is a cloak room. A full basement is in the rear (south) of the building.
2. Stairways: Nothing original left. The circular stairway of 15 treads was put in the northwest corner when the gallery was added.
3. Flooring: Wooden. At present it is completely covered with carpet. No record of a change.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster. The interior cornice is original. The two pilasters flanking the apse are in a Greek revival idiom, but may well be a part of the 1860's addition to the south. Linear wooden moulding connects the ceiling with the wall surface.
5. Doorways and doors: The doors in the present Church are at the southeast and southwest corner, and at the center of the north side. Doors also connect the enclosed spaces at the northeast and northwest corners with the Church proper.
6. Trim: Interior window frames seem original and are en-framed by simple wooden mouldings. In a basement storeroom is what is almost certainly the original pulpit, very simply designed in the Greek taste.
7. Hardware: Nothing original left. The door latches and hinges that exist now are generally of cast iron.
8. Lighting: Trustee's Minutes for May 2, 1834: "A communication was received from Thomas U. Walter, Esq., stating that suitable lamps for the North End of the Church would cost \$24." No mention as to type. Nothing old or original remains.
9. Heating: No record found of original heating method. No evidence of fireplaces. The present heating system is steam heat.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Building, which faces north, is flush against public pavement on W. Miner Street.

The early sketch, mentioned under Part I, A, 6 of this report, of the original setting shows only one tree within the yard.

2. Landscaping: Present buildings are flush with the side-walks.

Prepared by Bart Anderson
Curator, Chester County
Historical Society
National Park Service
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